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### G88-879 Peafowl

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## Peafowl

**This NebGuide discusses the care and feeding of the colorful and ornamental peafowl.**

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The peafowl is an ornamental bird which is often grown to adorn farmsteads, private estates or public parks and zoological gardens. They enjoy living in the open and prefer to roost in trees. The roosting place should be arranged some distance from dwellings because peafowl are inclined to be noisy, especially at night.

Once established in a new home, they are not inclined to stray away. However, older birds moved into a new location sometimes do not settle well and must be confined.

Peafowl are difficult to confine continuously. They fly readily, and if confined, must have a tall, open shed for a roosting place. They also must have a large, grass-covered run to be comfortable. The runs need to be at least seven feet tall to prevent birds from jumping up and injuring themselves on the top.

### **Breeds and Description**

There are two wild species of peafowl, the Indian and the Javan. The Indian species is most common in this country. A brief description of the plumage of the Indian Peafowl follows:

#### **Male**

The head and neck are metallic green, and the back is bronze. The upper tail coverts, which are small feathers covering larger feathers which form a long and beautiful train, are green with numerous large ocelli, or eyelike spots, each of which is ringed with blue and bronze. When closed the thighs and wings are buff, and the flight and tail feathers are cinnamon brown.

Full plumage, including the train, is not attained until the third year. The train is molted in the late summer and is not fully replaced before the end of winter.

## **Female**

The head is chestnut, the mantle green, and the back is brown, indistinctly mottled with buff. The throat and forepart of the neck are white. The breast is brownish black, fringed with green; the wing coverts are coarsely mottled with buff and black.

There is also a white variety of Indians which make an attractive display on a green, grassy background.

## **Mating and Egg Production**

Peafowl are polygamous, so four or five peahens may be mated to one male. Most peahens do not lay during their first year. During the second and third years they will lay a few eggs. By the fourth year they can be expected to produce five to nine eggs each year.

If eggs are removed from the nest as they are laid, the mature (four years or older) peahen may lay a second and even a third clutch of eggs. This could result in more eggs than one peahen can incubate. A peahen can incubate up to 10 eggs.

In the event of extra eggs it would be necessary to use artificial incubation, or a broody turkey hen might be used as a foster mother. Both peahens and turkeys make good mothers.

Thick shrubbery makes a suitable place for nesting. Some growers, however, choose to confine the peahens to a pen or yard during the egg laying period in the spring and early summer.

## **Incubation and Brooding**

The incubation period for peahen eggs is from 28-30 days. The simplest method is to allow peahens to incubate their own eggs. As mentioned earlier, a broody turkey hen also will do a good job.

Many younger hens do not set well in confinement. Should this occur, eggs should be gathered daily and held for future incubation. The eggs may be incubated artificially in much the same manner as chicken eggs (see NebGuide G80-524, *Incubation of the Home Flock*).

Artificially incubated peahen eggs that produce young peafowl can be brooded by turkey foster mothers or reared in confinement similar to turkeys (see NCR Extension Publication #60, *Small Turkey Flock Management*). Again, the simplest method of brooding is by the peahen mother in the open, or confined to a large coop for about six or seven weeks.

This brooding period is the most critical time in rearing the young, and is a good reason to confine the mother during the period. If the peahen is allowed to roam with the new chicks, many chicks are lost due to environmental conditions such as wet grass, thunderstorms, etc.

The coop should be located in a well-lighted and sheltered place. It should have a wire floor of 1/4-inch mesh hardware cloth, and should be kept on short grass and moved frequently.

Keep the young peafowl confined in the coop with the mother during the first week. The young can be released to come and go during the second week, but they need to be able to return to the confined mother. Keeping the peahen confined prevents the young from wandering off. After the seventh week release the mother.

## **Feeding and Rearing**

Young peafowl will live and grow much faster on a balanced ration than on grains alone. The young need adequate vitamins, trace minerals and amino acids to do well. Their physiology is similar to young turkeys, so turkey rations make excellent feed for peafowl (again see NCR Extension Publication #60, *Small Turkey Flock Management*).

Turkey rations include a starter (28 percent protein) and a series of grower rations that will last about four months. The final grower ration is usually about 14 percent protein and can be used to feed the growing peafowl until they are one year old. It also can be used to feed adults.

If turkey feeds are not available chicken starter can be used, but it usually is lower in protein than is most desirable to start young peafowl. When turkey feed is available, a blackherd preventive should be used in the water. Peafowl are very susceptible to this disease which may occur especially if there are chickens on the same place.

Young peafowl can learn to eat grain and may be fed millet or mixed small grains. The problem is that they will grow slower and are more prone to disease than if they are fed a turkey starter. When grown they may be fed whole grains, but grains alone are inadequate and regularly must be fed with chopped greenstuff and vegetables.

Keep grit, oyster shell and water available at all times. Peafowl are fond of insects and if plenty are available the birds (after they're fairly well-grown) will consume enough to satisfy their protein needs. The insect season only lasts about six months, however, so it is a good idea to supply peafowl with a protein supplement (turkey feed) when insects are not available.

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